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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8090
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0430
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 1972
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0771
RUEHDO/AMEMBASSY DOHA 0370
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 0450
RHMFSS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE
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RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEHDS/USMISSION USAU ADDIS ABABA
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 0493
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0876

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NOUAKCHOTT 000111

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/04/2019

TAGS: PGOV PREL KDEM MR

SUBJECT: TAWASSOUL, APP, AND SAWAB POLITICAL PARTIES OFFER
THEIR VIEWS

REF: A. 08 NOUAKCHOTT 722

1B. NOUAKCHOTT 28

1C. 08 NOUAKCHOTT 744

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Dennis Hankins for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: Two anti-coup parties and one pro-coup party gave their reactions to recent events. From the anti-coup Tawassoul and APP parties, the main themes were categorical rejection of the "National Dialogue on Democracy" and upcoming presidential elections, concern about civil war, and the need for a unified international community and targeted sanctions. From the pro-coup Sawab party, the main themes were the errors of President Abdallahi and the need for a mediator to find a way out of the crisis. End summary.

Tawassoul: Keeping the Faith

12. (C) PolAsst met Tawassoul party members in charge of external relations Dr. Amar Ould Mohamed Najem and Mohamed Lemine Ould Mohamed Moussa at party headquarters February 1. Since Embassy's last meeting with the moderate Islamist party (Ref A), the "National Dialogue on Democracy" took place, a date was set for presidential elections, and anti-Israel protests rocked Nouakchott.

13. (C) Regarding the "National Dialogue on Democracy," Najem characterized it as a "farce." It wasn't really a consultation, he argued; the proof being that RFD, the only participating political party with any credibility, withdrew from the proceedings. Najem and Moussa also discounted the presidential elections scheduled for June 6, saying "we reject them completely." Moussa said General Aziz is worse than President Taya, because while Taya was repressive, he was at least intelligent. Aziz is repressive, but also lacks intelligence, Moussa said. Unprompted, Najem and Moussa mentioned eventual civil war as a possibility if Aziz persisted in clinging to power.

14. (C) The discussion turned to the recent anti-Israel protests and the Minister of Interior's threat to bring formal charges against political leaders who organized the marches (Ref B), a move widely interpreted as a threat against Tawassoul. Najem said, "We are not concerned." When asked about the possibility of the regime banning the

Tawassoul party altogether, Najem and Moussa still were not troubled. They had endured torture and imprisonment under Taya, they said -- "we don't fear the authorities." PolAsst posed a hypothetical scenario: What if the junta offered to sever relations with Israel in exchange for the FNDD and Tawassoul supporting the regime? "Never," Najem stated. "Democracy is first."

APP: Targeted Sanctions are the Key

¶ 15. (C) PolAsst met Vice President Oumar Ould Yali, Secretary General Ladisi Traore, Vice Secretary General Mohamed Vall Ould Malmudy, and Executive Office member Ahmed Abdallahi at APP party headquarters February 1. APP, the party of National Assembly President Messaoud Ould Boulkheir, is strongly anti-coup.

¶ 16. (C) Yali thanked the USG for its firm commitment to the anti-coup cause in Mauritania, noting that some other countries, particularly European, did not appear to show the same enthusiasm for restoring democracy. The heads of state of some countries say one thing, while their ambassadors in Mauritania say something different, Yali noted. Comment: Although Yali did not name any names, he was almost certainly referring to France and Germany, both prime examples of the inconsistent statements between the head of state and respective ambassador. End comment.

¶ 17. (C) Yali maintained that there had been many efforts

NOUAKCHOTT 00000111 002 OF 003

(citing Boulkheir's proposal) to solve the "unprecedented impasse in our history," but the junta remained obstinate in face of all of this. Mentioning recent attempts by pro-coup parliamentarians to depose Boulkheir (Ref C), Yali said this would be a disaster. Boulkheir's dismissal would marginalize the Haratin, and provide the spark for ethnic violence. Stating that the junta "has created a mess of things," Yali expressed a deep concern that civil war could break out and lead to a situation reminiscent of Somalia.

¶ 18. (C) Yali echoed the sentiments of others in the FNDD, calling for targeted sanctions against the junta and its supporters. "This is the key," he said. If Mohamed Hmayenne Bouamatou and other financial backers of the junta are hit where their interests lie, support for Aziz will crumble, the reasoning goes.

Sawab: Can't We All Just Get Along?

¶ 19. (C) PolAsst met Sawab Vice President Dr. Mohamed El Moctar Ould Melil at party headquarters February 2. Sawab ("The Right Way" in Arabic) is an Arab nationalist and Baathist party. Baathism enjoyed widespread influence in the mid to late 1980's under Taya, but its influence has waned greatly since then. Nevertheless, Sawab remains active among the Arab elite. The party has adopted a pro-coup stance, though not an extreme one.

¶ 110. (C) Frequently digressing into long-winded Arab nationalist diatribes, Melil's position boiled down to a need to "solidify the rules of democracy" and find a mediator who could lead Mauritania out of its present crisis. There are two camps in the political scene diametrically opposed to each other, Melil stated, preventing any hope of arriving at a "consensus solution." Melil was dismissive of President Abdallahi, asserting that "he wasn't able to govern a democracy," turned his back on his own supporters, and was a major cause of the present crisis.

¶ 111. (C) PolAsst asked about the recent initiative put forth by the Bedil ("Alternative" in Arabic) party. (Note: Bedil

invited 16 political parties to a meeting January 28 with the objective of "opening dialogue" to find a solution to the crisis. Sawab participated in the meeting. End note.) Melil stated that his party attended because there must be "another option" to end the crisis, and emphasized again the need for a mediator. As for the mechanics of the initiative, Bedil had only invited political parties that met certain criteria, Melil said. For example, the parties had to be represented in Parliament, or have received at least 1% of the vote in the last elections, and so on. These criteria narrowed the field down to 16 political parties, and it was these parties that Bedil invited to its meeting. When PolAsst noted that all of the attending parties were in the pro-coup camp, Melil said that the RFD turned down the invitation because it was "preoccupied with its own internal problems" and was waiting to arrive at a unified position. The FNDD declined, he said, because invitations were sent to individual parties -- they wanted an invitation sent to the FNDD as a whole. Comment: The FNDD was probably wary of possible attempts by coup supporters to create divisions in its ranks. Bedil's efforts to take the lead in resolving the crisis are likely to remain unproductive if they cannot secure the participation of anti-coup forces. End comment.

Comment

¶12. (C) Tawassoul and APP show no signs of yielding from their firm anti-coup position, and remain committed to defeating the junta. Their readiness to raise the possibility of civil war is a new development; previous discussions assumed a peaceful resolution to the crisis. Members of both APP and Tawassoul now seem to regard a violent outcome as increasingly likely. As for the pro-coup Sawab party, beyond the usual criticisms of Abdallahi, their

NOUAKCHOTT 00000111 003 OF 003

call for a mediator to resolve the crisis is interesting. It may signal a softening of pro-coup sentiment among some members of the political class as they hedge their bets in light of the turbulent political scene. Likewise, the realization that the threat of sanctions is real may have focused people's attention and sparked their desire to find a way out of the crisis as soon as possible.

HANKINS